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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003418

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ VISITS SAMARRA
UNANNOUNCED

Classified By: PRT LEADER RICK BELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Salah Ad Din reporting cable.

SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq recently paid an unannounced visit to the Al-Askari (Golden) Mosque in Samarra, Salah Ad Din (SAD) province. The Mayor of Samarra complained to PRT SaD that there had been no advance notice of the visit. The Iranian Ambassador's apparent ability to visit Samarra and the Golden Mosque without official provincial assistance lends credence to SaD Sunni fears that Iran is gaining significant influence over the reconstruction of the Mosque, and is seeking to establish radical Shi'a control of the predominantly Sunni city itself. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) On October 1, 2008 Samarra Mayor Mahmood Khalaf Ahmed and SaD Governor Hamad Hamood Shekti unexpectedly encountered the Iranian Ambassador (Hassan Kazemi-Qomi) on a visit to the Al-Askari (Golden) Mosque. Shekti spoke briefly with the Ambassador.

[1](#)4. (C) In the two weeks following the Iranian Ambassador's visit, Mayor Mahmood has repeatedly approached the PRT Satellite representative in Samarra with his concern that the visit was arranged through channels independent of the local government process. No local or provincial civilian or military authorities were notified of the visit or consulted for their approval. On October 10, Mayor Ahmed reconfirmed that IA Commander of the Samarra Operations Center, MG Rasheed, was not aware of and did not approve of the visit.

COMMENT

[1](#)5. (C) This is not the first instance where a high level visitor has arrived unannounced in Samarra, but it is the first instance where the visitor made no official contact with local authorities before or during such a visit. Local Samarra and SaD authorities fear that Iran is gaining significant influence over the reconstruction of the Mosque, and is seeking long term control of the Mosque area and the city itself. They are further concerned that Iran will assist Hezbollah or a similar organization infiltrating Samarra with the goal of eventually bringing the city under radical Shi'a control. The Iranian Ambassador's apparent ability to visit the Golden Mosque unannounced with inside (and unofficial) assistance stokes these fears. END COMMENT
CROCKER